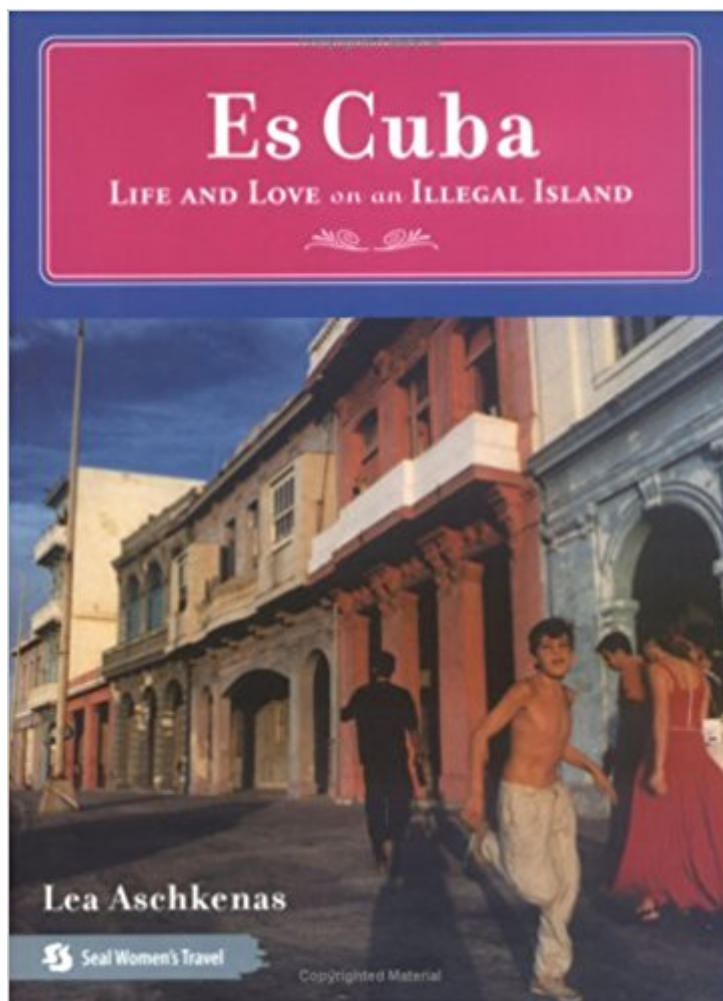


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# Es Cuba: Life And Love On An Illegal Island



## Synopsis

*Es Cuba* is a poignant and passionate travel memoir about falling in love with a country and one of its compatriots. Aschkenas never strays from her acute awareness that there is no way to separate her foreignness (intensified by U.S.-Cuba relations) from the complex mix of emotions, devotion and rejection, enrapture and apprehension that she develops toward the country. Her tale is filled with beautifully woven descriptions of Cuba and the customs and habits of its people. Aschkenas is a discerning observer, taking in the innocence, isolation, contradictions, and resolute optimism of a people who have persevered against the collective disappointment bestowed upon them by a government that has been unable to deliver the utopia promised by socialism. Aschkenas, already a seasoned traveler by the time she arrives in Cuba for the first time in 1999, is overcome by her own passion for Cuba and her unraveling affection for Alfredo as she comes to appreciate his naïveté, sincerity, and ability to live for the moment, something she comes to realize is the effect of growing up in a culture where nothing is ever certain.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Love is the operative word in journalist Aschkenas's intimate, detailed memoir of 10 months spent exploring life in Cuba—love for a young Cuban man whose devotion largely defines her journey. In February 2000, shortly after the Elián Gonzalez custody battle became the cause célèbre for nationalists, Aschkenas goes to Cuba for a language program with an American social justice organization. As a tourist, she is housed in an exclusive hotel in a wealthy Havana neighborhood, removed from the dirt-poor, hand-to-mouth struggling Cubans, whose average monthly salary is

\$12. She soon meets Alfredo, a black-skinned stage technician who teaches her to eschew "la vida plastica" in order to learn about the "real Cuba" of argot, bribery (a dollar gets her practically anything she needs), machismo, El Bombo (the visa lottery that allows Cubans to immigrate to the U.S.) and racism. Aschkenas gradually moves to a shared house in Centro Habana (inner-city Havana) run by several generations of Cuban women who enlighten her on feminist revolutionary history. Throughout, she and Alfredo learn to readjust their assumed ideas of nationality and politics as Aschkenas continually confronts the lesson "of how little in Cuba is as it appears on the surface." (Jan.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

It's interesting. I like the way the author explains her experience in Cuba and gives you an idea how's life over there.

Being a native of Cuba and having visited Cuba in 1999, this book brought back many memories. Some were fun and some just frustrating. The author captures the frustrations and often the comical way that "Cuba" makes it's own people and those who visit the island act. The injustice of how the Cubans are treated, in their own homeland, the constant police watch you feel wherever you go. This book points speaks clearly about the spirit of the Cubans. Even though they are frustrated, underpaid, underfed, etc. they still get up every morning and look for whatever good there is to find. This shows in their love of life, music and everything else that may give them a bit of joy for the day. Interesting is the fact that she points out that the Cubans have a need to "consume" all that is before them, i.e., rum, sweets, etc. as if this was the last chance they would ever taste or have it again. A must read for anyone wanting to know the REAL Cuba and not the propaganda that Cuba feeds the media at every turn. Bravo. Oh, Yes...a very entertaining read, indeed!!!

Highly recommended. A nicely written love-and-hate tale of contradictions in contemporary Cuban life. Want to know why Cubans are powerfully proud of their "Communist experiment" and their feisty independence from the U.S. -- but also yearn to get out and row double-speed to Miami? Here are some of the answers, and a good, twisty romance story to boot. I also bought, and the recipient of both of these books loved, *I Was Cuba* — *I Was Cuba: Treasures from the Ramiro Fernandez Collection* — You want photos, Gringo? Now, theese are photos! Cuba's past is alive, here, and you may also find glimpses of a post-Castro future.

An easy read, if it were fiction and racism didn't exist in the world. However, that is not the

case. Therefore, this is a very-difficult-to-stomach-at-times read. The author's totally and completely lack of any knowledge about left-wing racism (welcome to my home state California!!! Especially my Northern California...) was disturbing, and though she was assertive in telling her Black lover that his claims of racism were "ridiculous" and annoyed and "irritated" her, when her white guesthouse owner friend engaged in overt racism including making ape noises replete with a clownish ape walk to imitate Black men--but when other whites (from Scandinavia) moved out of the guesthouse because of her friend's racism--then and only then did the author consider that the guesthouse owner might be racist. White is still right in the author's eyes and Cuba is an exotic whim to be described as a curious dark sideshow. Even the description of her lover is very simplistic, all we know is he is brown and then... Don't forget how "brown" he is! And to be honest, they didn't really seem compatible at all. I never got the sense they were in love, just fascinated with the political statement they were making and/or the possibilities of a new life and way of thinking the other person "might" offer. But to be fair, isn't that why a lot of us fall in love? Nonetheless, the prose is well written if not entirely well-thought out. Narrow, but not mean spirited--which makes it dangerous all the same.

Gave me a real feel for what Cubans must endure in their day-to-day struggles.

I ordered this book on a whim... Found it non-engaging, repetitive and redundant. The author makes an attempt to give countless specific and almost insignificant details, which drove me nuts... I usually read books in days, but it has taken me about a month to finish this one. A drag masked as a love story and tale of self discovery. One word... boring

Great story of real life in Cuba in this novel. Great service. Very good quality book. Thank you very much.

Good

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